MODERN BUSINESS.

A LECTURE

BY

MR. GEORGE HAGUE,

GENERAL MANAGER OF THE MERCHANTS BANK OF CANADA.

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DELIVERED BEFORE THE MONTREAL YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION, ON THURSDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 19TH, 1878,

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NOTICE.

The following Lecture on "MODERN BUSINESS"—one of a Free Course—was delivered under the auspices of the MONTREAL YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION, on December 19th, 1878. It was prepared amidst the pressure of business engagements, and is not altogether what it might have been had more time been available for the purpose.

It is, however, published at the request of many who heard it, in the hope that the principles roughly laid down, and the suggestions thrown out, may be a guide to young men amidst the perils of modern business life.

Modern Business.

In addressing the members and friends of the Young Men's Christian Association on the subject of "Modern Business," I desire to view it in the light which the Word of God, and especially its latest manifestation in Christianity, enable us to throw upon it. Let me say at the outset, that this is no narrow or fanatical position for any man to take. A long experience of affairs and books and men, convinces most persons that the deepest philosophy of life, the shrewdest judgments of human nature, and a knowledge absolutely perfect of all that is best to understand, are to be gathered from the pages of that marvellous collection, which, in its complete form, has long attained the honorable title of "The Book"—"The Bible." Its principles are, in themselves, a true touchstone. Properly applied, they reveal the right and the wrong of almost everything. The false and the true, the real, the unreal, the permanent and the evanescent, are made to appear as certainly—often by a single text—as, by the application of a single drop of acid, the genuine silver is distinguished from the base nickel.

In expressing opinions, therefore, with regard to the characteristics of modern business, I claim it to be a wise and intelligent thing to follow the principles laid down in this old and long tried volume. The wisdom of applying such a test as this may be doubted or disputed. I can, however, say this:—that as years pass by, and knowledge of the world widens, so do my ideas increase of the value and reliability of this criterion.

I have to speak to-night on some of the characteristics of Modern business, the phrase suggesting a distinction between what is modern, and what is not modern. And here, not forgetting that there was an age of great voyages and discoveries, and trade

enterprises, and wonderful inventions, in a period long before the present generation, I draw a sharp dividing line at a period not far distant, and within the memory of many that are now before me. There have been in operation for about a generation back, various powers and activities, unknown from the time the world began, which have added marvellously to man's command of the great forces of Nature. By means of these, men have subdued and brought under their control distant and formerly unknown regions. Certain races of mankind, and particularly our own British race, in its two fold form of European and American, have been able to spread themselves of late over the surface of the earth, with a celerity and success which had not been dreamed of in former ages. The agents I refer to are the Railway, the Steamboat, and the Electric Telegraph, to which may perhaps be added the highly developed Machinery with which we are all now so familiar. The Railway has quadrupled the rapidity of internal communication, and increased its volume twenty-fold; the Steamboat has done as much for ocean travel. Both, you will observe, are marvellous economisers of time, and time, we all know, is money. Most potent of all, however, is the Telegraph, which annihilates distance altogether, and brings the economy of time to perfection, realizing Shakespeare's vision in "The Tempest" of "putting a girdle round the earth in forty minutes." The period antecedent to the discovery of these potent agencies, and that which has succeeded it, differ in essential characteristics. Their introduction marks a new era, not only in the history of modern times, but, one may say, perhaps, without presumption, of the very world itself. Before this era, indeed, there had been unequalled displays of enterprise and courage on the part of those who were carrying the business of the world on; there had been ambition and daring in the crossing of seas, and the taking possession of countries for trade purposes, but the scale on which this could be done was limited by the circumstances of the times. Now, however, by the operation of these potent agencies, the very world itself has become like one vast country. Many of those who carry on modern business make the whole world their tributaries,—using this phrase, of course, in what may be called

a "trade" sense. For the business of which I speak is not that of conquering the world by force of arms, as Cæsar did, nor of administering the affairs of colonies and empires like the Indian and Colonial Offices of our own Motherland: it is neither military, nor political, nor even professional business; but it is that, first, which takes its rise in the cultivation of the earth, above ground or below, and whose results are the production of all things capable of being grown or mined;—next, that of adapting these productions to the varied uses which man has found for them, by divers processes of manufacture;—finally, the business of carrying the productions of one country to another, and distributing them through a thousand channels to the people by whom they are finally used. These, it will be observed, comprise the leading divisions of human industry,—viz., Agriculture; (to which may be joined mining and lumbering), Manufactures; and Commerce (in which last we must include navigation, railways and telegraphs). The question of production, you will observe, covers the first and second of these—that is, two-thirds of the whole ground over which business operations extend. For production must always precede diffusion. Agriculture and Manufactures come before Commerce. We must possess before we can trade,—a truth which has a vital bearing upon the great question of Free Trade or Protection, and which, if duly considered, might modify, to some extent, opinions that have been put forth respecting it. In all these divisions of the wide field of business, our own race has for many ages occupied the foremost place. The Empire with which we are so proud to be identified, upon which the sun never sets, has largely been created, and obtained its present extraordinary dimensions, as the result of the business instinct and trading faculty of our restless British community. In this it differs from any Empire that ever existed. When Napoleon called us a nation of shopkeepers, he was not so far wrong as some have imagined. If he had called us a nation of merchants and traders, and added that we were as ambitious, and daring, and restless in these pursuits as he was in that of war, he would have come near the exact truth. Consider the means by which the British Empire has extended its boundaries so

remarkably. India, an empire within itself, consisting of kingdoms upon kingdoms, with scores of millions of divers races and populations, came under British rule entirely as the result of trading enterprise on the part of a company of London merchants. One of the most marvellous political phenomena of modern times is the fact that this vast empire was actually ruled for more than fifty years by these men of business. It was a trading company, also, that explored and governed for more than a century the enormous regions stretching from ocean to ocean to the north of us, which we are just beginning to call our own. During generation after generation, in these vast territories, comprising an area as large as the whole of the United States, no rule, power, or authority was known but that of the Hudson Bay Company. And let it be said to the honor of these men of business, that their rule, in all its leading features, was wise, honorable, and just; and that their methods of dealing with the Indian tribes which roamed over their territory have been found of the greatest possible advantage for Canada itself to follow. There is scarcely a favorable centre, in fact, on any of the four continents that has not been occupied for trading purposes by English-speaking people. Not to speak of larger colonies and a Dominion like ours, we have in China places like Hong-Kong and Shanghai; in Japan, Yokohama; in the Eastern Archipelago, Singapore; in Africa, the Mauritius, Natal, and the Cape of Good Hope; on this continent, the West Indian Islands; in the South Seas, Fiji—the last, and in some respects one of the most interesting of our acquisitions. All these are occupied as centres of business by men of our own race and language. In them all we find Banks, Newspapers, Post Offices, Telegraphs, and all the appliances of modern civilization, almost entirely conducted by Englishmen, and, of course, in the English language.

A Russian, not long ago, was speaking to a Chinese gentleman who was about to visit the Paris Exhibition—(the conversation

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NOTE.—I am aware that military and political genius has had more to do of late with extending the boundaries of our Eastern Empire; but trade was at the foundation of it.

took place in China)—about the vast extent of the Empire of Russia, as Russians are fond of doing, and by way of contrasting it with that of England, pointed out the respective places occupied by Russia and the British Islands on the Map of the World. Our old island home, we all know, makes a very sorry figure there. "But," said the Chinese to my informant in Paris, "when I came to Europe, after leaving a port of my own country, in sight of the British flag, I travelled more than half round the world, and found that flag flying everywhere! After crossing our own seas, we landed at Singapore, and found the flag there. We sailed over another sea, and touched at Ceylon; then at Bombay, then at Aden on the Red Sea, and found the British flag in all of them. We crossed over the Isthmus to Alexandria, and found nearly all the ships in the harbor flying the same flag. We crossed the Mediterranean, calling at Malta, and again at Gibraltar, and found it there again. Finally, we anchored in a British port, and, of course, the flag was there. But," said the Chinaman very shrewdly, "I never saw the flag of Russia anywhere!"

Even here, in Canada, we have a firm which publishes its business circulars in nearly every language on the face of the globe. I hold in my hand a few of these circulars. Here is one in the Chinese language; here is another in Armenian; another is in Greek; another in Hungarian; another in Roumanian, and another in Norwegian. These, I can assure you, are not literary trifles for the curious, but circulars for men of business, setting forth the merits of the manufacturer's ware. The gentleman, whose advertisements I have shown you, told me he was once travelling on business—Canadian business—in Eastern Russia, and attending the fair of Nishni-Novgorod, a fair totally unlike anything we know on this continent; in which the business of a whole year seems crowded into the transactions of a few days, during which millions of money change hands, and goods are concentrated for a short time, the product of every country on earth, to be diffused during the rest of the year over the communities of such a vast empire as that of Russia. My friend told me that, standing in that fair and hearing the Babel of tongues

around him (for there were men speaking almost every European and Asiatic language), and thinking of himself as alone in that vast crowd (for there were about 100,000 merchants congregated), he was suddenly touched upon the shoulder, and turning round, saw the face of a well known friend from New York State, and heard, in a very familiar tongue indeed, the salutation, "Hallo! my dear fellow, what on earth are you doing here?" It transpired that one had come to sell Sewing Machines from Canada; the other, Agricultural Implements from the States on its border. They had met in this far distant city on the confines of Asia, carrying the latest product of New World ingenuity for use over Old World continents. Such is the sphere that now presents itself to the occupation of a man of business; such are the conditions under which modern trade can be carried on. A hundred years ago, the manufacturer could scarcely get beyond the bounds of his own district. Fifty years ago it was difficult to get beyond the limits of his own country;—then even the foreign trade of the British Empire was very circumscribed. Now, the same men have the world open to them. Travellers or agents scour whole continents on their behalf, and cross oceans, and plant themselves amongst people of every language, gathering up orders for goods to supply the wants of all mankind. It is this that gives modern business its peculiar character. These are the circumstances under which the modern merchant has become what he is to-day. That all this has its good aspect we are proud to acknowledge. It assists, in its way, in carrying out the great command of the Creator to "subdue the earth," and it has developed in its progress some of the greatest qualities of our common nature. Such conquests as these are more commendable than those of Cæsar and Napoleon. These "victories of peace" are no less renowned than those of war; at any rate, we may fairly claim they ought to be.

But out of these very characteristics of modern business many of its vices have taken rise. Things to be regretted, that cause pain and shame in their contemplation; things that wise, and good, and honorable men find it difficult to struggle with, can be directly traced to the operation of those very forces which have

been evoked in the world-wide struggles of these times we live in.

Before entering upon this subject, let me say one word as to the essential principle that should underlie all business operations. Business takes its rise in the natural or acquired wants of humanity, and the man that can supply these wants is the man that has some business ready to his hand. The first wants are food, clothing and shelter, and the man that can provide food, the man that can provide clothing, the man that can provide shelter, he is always certain, more or less, of occupation. All such labor, in fact, implies that a *service* has been rendered to the customer or the community. Now the rendering of service is the true end of business. Bear this in mind, for it is a fundamental consideration. I am thoroughly convinced that the more we keep this in view, the more satisfactory and the more profitable business relations will become. There will then be a pleasure in carrying business on, a pleasure in producing the article that is to be of service, a pleasure in the very manufacture itself, whether we make much money by it or not. The man that keeps this in view, has, at any rate, the consciousness that he has filled a useful place in the community in which he dwells—that he has done some service to the State in his time and day. He has, it may be, furnished the clothing which was needed by families, or he has rendered home elegant and cheerful by his furniture. He has furnished food, or light, or books, or dwellings, or the means and appliances for travel. He has brought the production of one country to enrich another, or has enabled others to do it. Let us keep this idea in view—that is, of business being based on service rendered—and it gives it an elevation and a dignity which rob it of the base attributes with which, in many minds, it is associated. These notions of business have originated entirely from that perverted idea of it which makes the getting of money its primary object. When men fix their minds principally on making money, and for the sake of it practise the debasing arts of deceit, adulteration, scheming, and over-reaching, by which, too often, wealth is sought to be grasped, without the labor which is the only proper pre-requisite to it, then business

becomes base enough. But let me say this, that just as men may miss an object by aiming directly at it, but may gain it by pursuing a course which all experience proves to lead up to it, though indirectly, so it happens in a large number of cases, that those who make the getting of money their first object lose all the satisfaction which arises, or should arise, from the carrying of business on, and lose their main object besides. They that *will* be rich very seldom acquire permanent wealth. They may have it, but it will flee from them; they may obtain it, but it will pass away. The shoddy men of the Fifth Avenue do not stop there long. The *parvenu*, boastful of his riches, seldom dies rich, and still more seldom builds up a prosperous family, which inherits and carries down his wealth to future generations. But the man that can do something for the service of mankind, who takes a pleasure in doing it — in doing good work for the work's sake,—and is content with the reward which that doing brings, that is the man who has satisfaction in his business as he proceeds. And when wealth comes, as it probably will, it will be taken as a matter of course, and coming in that manner, it will be counted not as the *summum bonum* of life, but valued at its proper worth. We have much to unlearn in these modern days in this respect. We have to "hark back" in order to get upon the track which we forsook many years ago. A London tradesman of the modern school, calling one of his employés to account, scolded him sharply because his sales were so little in comparison with others; and on the young man replying that he sold all that the customers wanted, he replied, "What is the good of that? Any fool can do that. *I want men that can sell people what they don't want!*" And there are men that can do this—smart salesmen, so called. There are shops and warehouses where this is known to be done, and the men that keep these shops and warehouses, and carry on this forcing business, may drive a prosperous trade for a time, and make money; but these very processes by which such results are accomplished undermine the business in time. People, when they find that goods are being pushed upon them that they don't want, rather give that store the go-by in future. "Come, walk into my parlor, said the spider to the fly," but, certainly, if the fly

had been there once and got safely out, it would be careful not to go there a second time. So this policy destroys itself. On the other hand, the tradesman who takes care to keep good and serviceable ware, builds up, if slowly yet surely, and gathers an increasing trade about him—a trade which is built upon satisfactory service rendered. It is this very system of driving and pushing business beyond legitimate bounds, and selling people what they don't want on a large scale, that brings about these periodical reverses, under one of which we are suffering now. "The love of money is the root of all evil," said an apostle. It is certainly at the root of this. Men imagine that because they make and sell a certain number of a given article, and reap a certain profit from it, that if they could only double or treble their sales they would make two or three times the money. Accordingly they lay in larger and larger stocks, engage more and more hands, and drive a larger and still increasing business, forgetting that there are others taking the same view of things, impelled by the same passion, driven along by the same desires, each imagining that they, and they alone, are the wise men who can double and treble their profits by observing the signs of the times. The result, however, is, as a rule, the larger the business the smaller the profit. A manufacturer who makes a certain quantity of Woollens, Hardware or Lumber, and reaps a certain profit for one or two years in succession, imagines that if he only doubled the capacity of his mill he could make double the net returns, and, consequently, with his own or borrowed capital (only too frequently borrowed), he makes the enlargement. But when his new machines are brought into play, he finds to his grief that he cannot sell as readily as he did his old product. He is then driven to pursue irregular, improper, and unhealthy methods to force his goods on unwilling customers, who, in their turn, have to do likewise with theirs. Now when this takes place on a large scale, as it periodically does, all arising from that desperate covetousness and greedy grasping after money, which is so universal a passion in these days, against which we are so often warned in Scripture, the whole world is full of the means and appliances for over-production, the result being that there are

thrown on the market quantities of unsaleable goods, from which speedily arise difficulty with bankers, insolvency, and general prostration.

It would take too long to philosophize upon this interesting subject of the proper bearings of production and consumption from a world-wide point of view, and I must content myself with briefly intimating that such a thing exists, and that in this is to be found the root of troubles which have afflicted various eras and times, and countries, and most notably the present, and our own. This disturbance has taken place before ; but it was neither so violent, nor did it come so often in former days. The methods of business as then current did not lead up to such results as a rule. There is an old way—an old-fashioned way, some would call it,—and there is a new way. I desire now to put the two together and see how they look side by side. Of course, in making this comparison, I can only do so broadly and generally, and premising that numbers of exceptions might be found to the picture drawn both of the one and the other.

It will not, I believe, be disputed by those who knew the old times, the days of the last century and of the first quarter of this, that the leading characteristics of business, as then carried on, might be summed up as follows :—In the first place, there was, as a rule, a long period of careful preparation on the part of those who engaged in it, and a thorough mastering of the particular line of business carried on. Equally conspicuous was the habit of careful and wise economy, and of a steady and slow accumulation of capital. There was also, as a marked characteristic, a care in incurring liabilities,—the result of the whole being, in a majority of instances, a tolerable amount of success, in a number of cases what we would call a respectable competency, and in a few rare instances the acquisition of a moderate fortune. Of the careful preparation I need scarcely speak, and can only refer to the long apprenticeship of youths to their several callings. Respecting the thorough mastery of business, I need only to recall to your

recollection how, on the continent of Europe, and in England, the man who had learned his trade in one town or village was not content until he had practiced it in some great capital where it had attained its highest development; or, as was the practice on the continent, had made the round of various cities, and never thought of setting up for himself until he had acquired the mastery of the art in centres where it had attained perfection. As to the saving and gradual accumulation of capital, I can only recall those who are familiar with the old times, either of England, New England, or France, or Germany, to the manner in which, little by little, pound by pound, the store went on accumulating, slowly, quietly and gradually, but giving, let me say, immense satisfaction, (far more satisfaction than our accumulations do in these days), as it quietly and steadily grew. Let me say in passing, that it is not the quantity of money that gives the satisfaction. There never was a deeper philosophy than that uttered by the great Teacher of mankind, that a man's life consisteth not in the *abundance* of the things he possesseth. There is more real satisfaction in quietly and persistently accumulating the first thousand dollars, than there is in greedily grasping after, and getting, by speculation (all but dishonestly) the half millions and millions that are so glibly talked about in these modern times. There was care taken in former days in incurring liabilities, for men in those times valued their position, their honor, and their credit. The word of an English merchant was his bond. The motto of one of the most honorable of the great Guilds of England, those Companies which form so prominent a feature in English business life, was this: "*If you would succeed in business, take care to keep up your credit.*" And men kept up their credit then by punctuality, by honesty, by being careful how much they bought, how much they borrowed, and how much they became liable for on behalf of others. They thoroughly believed then in the old Scripture saying, "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it; but he that hateth suretyship is sure." And as a consequence of all this, in the business of old times, failure was a rare occurrence, and something to be fought against until the very last, as bearing dishonor to themselves and their children. Men succeeded then

far more generally than they do now. Whether they were better men, wiser men, stronger men—men more capable of carrying business on, or not, I do not absolutely say ; but if to succeed in what a man undertakes is a test of his wisdom, ability, and capacity, then tried by this test, the business men of former days were superior to those of the present time. They succeeded where we so often fail.

Now, turning over the leaf, and opening the chapter of our Modern Business Society,—looking at it, I again repeat, broadly and generally, remembering that there are many exceptions to both conditions—(for there were reckless schemers in the old time, and there are many who are the reverse now),—yet looking broadly and generally over the wide field of business in these times, I cannot but see that, to a large extent, the following must be considered as its essential characteristics :—In the first place, there has been an extraordinary development of business ambition, and, following upon this, of restlessness. These two combined have often developed recklessness, and all of them have led on to unscrupulousness ; the end being a few instances of vast accumulation and enormous wealth—fabulous sums amassed in the hands of one man, such as were never heard of in former days, coupled, on the other hand, with numbers of failures, out of all proportion to what formerly prevailed, and to a development, in these very failures themselves, of dishonesty, of unlawful scheming, of criminal concealment, and the putting in practice of every possible device for keeping back from creditors that which is their lawful due. To such an extent is this now the case, that a father, launching his son on the sea of business life, cannot but be filled with apprehension—(and a very reasonable apprehension, too)—that at some time or other his son may be swept away by some great wave of inflation or speculation, and stranded, where multitudes of others have been stranded, in hopeless wreck and bankruptcy ; it being well if he escapes from this without the dishonor of himself and his parents' good name.

Let me look at these things a little more particularly. I say that modern business, especially in its larger manifestations, is

characterized by *Ambition*. And here I do not refer to a reasonable and wise desire to get on, as time and years go by, but to that passion for large operations, extensive dealings, immense and widely extended connections, which form a part of the very atmosphere that is breathed by the younger men of our mercantile circles, and which it requires unusual strength and fortitude of will to resist.

There are men who are never satisfied unless they can eclipse their neighbors, and before whose dazzled imagination vast figures, immense lines of credit, and enormous operations are flitting all day long. Such men are continually reaching out their hands here, there, and everywhere, after new enterprises, being all the while destitute of either the training, the experience, the knowledge, or the capital which would alone ensure success. Men who, perhaps, born and brought up in a country village or small town, and whose education, training and capital fit them for no other sphere, read in the newspapers about ventures, speculations, and successful operations, and become fired with ambition to emulate them. A man of this class, borrowing the means from confiding and eager bankers, obtaining the guarantee of silly and trustful friends, ventures out upon the wide sea with his tiny bark, trusting that he will be able to do what the great ocean steamer, with her staunch build, experienced commander, and perfect appliances can alone accomplish. This is the kind of man who is only too familiar to us, not only in this new and progressive continent, but in the great commercial centres of the old world.

Who can read the terrible revelations now coming to the surface in connection with the men that have occasioned the dreadful wreck of the City of Glasgow Bank, without feeling that it was an insatiable and mad ambition to grasp a world-wide trade that devoured them,—an ambition that went on with the force and impetus of a blind passion, piling operation upon operation, and venture upon venture, scheme upon scheme, and credit upon credit, until their ships were sailing upon every sea, and every ship-load resulting in further and further loss; until their ventures had accumulated results on every continent, and all

these ventures were losing ones. Scandalous to say, these men themselves were trustees of others, supplying the means, out of the very funds that had been entrusted to them, for gratifying that mad ambition, which, having overleaped itself, has fallen so dismally on the other side, and dragged half Scotland down along with it.

I have mentioned *Restlessness* as another outgrowth of the peculiar conditions of modern life; and here I cannot but appeal to the experience with which we are familiar in our own country, and of which we hear so much of in the States, of men exchanging the occupation with which they have been familiar from childhood, and of whose conditions they are perfectly cognisant, for one they know nothing about, and the entering upon which is as pure a venture and speculation, as would be the embarking of a man on an unknown sea who had never manned an oar, or trimmed a sail. It is sometimes boasted of as a virtue by our American cousins, that if a man fail in one pursuit, he can, under the conditions of society prevailing there, easily change it for another, and that to another again. I cannot say that this is matter for much boasting. The old adage is still true—"A rolling stone gathers no moss." Of course I speak generally, and remembering that every rule has its exception. This facility for change is bad in its effect upon the moral calibre of the people, in its preventing the exercise of those good old qualities of patience, perseverance and courage under difficulties, that fighting against obstacles until we become master of the position, which are part of the finest characteristics of man. I do not know anything more beautiful in Scripture story, than the description given, in three words, of the attitude of Gideon's army when following the flying foe over Jordan: "Faint, yet pursuing." Yes; instead of this restlessness which leads a man to change with every breath of wind, and at the appearance of the slightest difficulty, to give up the pursuit in which he is engaged and try another, I would hold it to be a far better thing, a far more manly thing, to stick to that pursuit, steadily and manfully, day after day, and year after year, conquering difficulties by perseverance, "turning the nettle, Danger, into the flower, Safety," as Shakespeare puts it, learning lessons from

defeat and difficulty, until the day comes when victory and a competency appear as the reward of plodding toil. That, to my mind, is a far finer sight than of the man who goes about restlessly from occupation to occupation, from State to State, from Province to Province, being everything by turns, and nothing long: doing no good either to himself, to his family, nor to the community in which he dwells. It is this spirit of restlessless which has induced so many of our farmers' sons to leave that best of all pursuits, the cultivation and development of the soil which God has given us, and to betake themselves to the villages and towns, there to enter upon an occupation for which neither education nor habits have fitted them. "Keeping store," they call it: which generally means, lazily loafing about through the long hours of the day behind the counter, selling goods of whose quality they are ignorant, which they have bought from credulous wholesale dealers, to persons whom their own credulity induces them to trust,—the end being, as we know by painful experience in this good city of Montreal, what we call Failure. I say, what we call Failure. That is, not failure to make a fortune, or acquire a competency, or even to make a living, but failure to pay the obligations they have contracted and to fulfil the promises which they have made,—a failure which, in my judgment, inevitably carries a certain amount of blame or disgrace with it.

I am not pleading here for such an old world system as prevails from age to age, and century to century, in countries like India, where men are rigidly bound in the trammels of caste, and where a father transmits his trade to his son, and he to his again, generation after generation; the only break to this monotony being the dread breaking out of war, or the ravages of pestilence. That is one extreme. But I must confess that there being an extreme in that direction, we have swung on this continent to the opposite one.

But far worse than this habit of restlessness is the next of these too frequent characteristics of the time. I have said that men have become *reckless*, and that much of modern business is characterized by this dangerous feature. Ambitious and restless

men are driven along by the violence of their fancies and passions, carried away by the currents of influence and opinion, and, consciously or unconsciously, in the hurry and multiplicity of engagements which accumulate upon them, a reckless and uncalculating habit of mind is generated. This recklessness is often misnamed *enterprise;* but the two have only the same relation that a bad shilling has to a good one. There are elements of danger in all trade operations; but a thoughtful man, who values his character, honor, and peace of mind, will calculate his risks, keep them within due bounds, consider what may happen under every contingency, and take care to provide against it. A wise General, in the conduct of an army, will have his reserves, will continue his line of communication, will not undesirably expose his flanks, and in the midst of bold and daring operations, will take care to leave a line of retreat open. Much of modern business, however, is distinguished by an entire absence of this calculating spirit. We advance boldly, without knowledge, without care, and without sense. Men undertake enterprises without the slightest knowledge of the conditions which alone can ensure success. A stupendous instance of this sort of recklessness may be found in the initiatory correspondence with regard to the construction of our own Pacific Railway. We are beginning to find out, after years of experiment, what such an enterprise means. We have found that the work of surveying alone is one which involves labor of long duration, toil and difficulty undreamed of, and an outlay of time, labor, money, and life, which give us some shadow of an idea of what will have to be encountered when the thing itself comes to be attempted—when the *road* has to be constructed over uninhabited regions, through rocky mountain ranges, threading its way through horrible and stupendous gorges, concentrating within itself all the engineering difficulties which have ever been encountered since the world began. Yet, in a preliminary stage of the negotiations which were on foot about seven years ago, a letter was written by two persons respecting it, who had never surveyed a yard of ground in their life, had never constructed a mile of either turnpike or railway from the day they were born—who were totally ignorant of every

one of the conditions of the stupendous enterprise before them,—yet they write a short note as if they were engaging to build a house that would cost $5,000, and undertake to say that they will "*build the road*" for so much! We have heard, as an illustration of folly, of men making a railway to the moon. I cannot conceive of any greater illustration of recklessness than is contained in such an offer, considering who the men were that made it. We must all have met with men of the same stamp—men that were ready to undertake anything, at any time, to any amount, and that without the command of the slightest means, without the least experience, and with only the slenderest basis of knowledge,—trusting to the sheer force of impudence on their own part, and the ignorance of others, to carry them through. What but recklessness could induce a man—albeit he was a man of extraordinary capacity—like Strousberg, whose fame as a railway contractor filled Europe a few years ago, to be engaged in such a number of colossal undertakings at the same time,—building railways hundreds of miles long in Russia, in Roumania, in the heart of Germany, in France, in the north of Europe, carrying on at the same time great ironworks, building innumerable cottages and workshops, buying up whole towns, enlarging and improving cities, buying magnificent mansions in various parts of the continent, opening banking accounts and credits in every capital, borrowing enormous sums of money, and deceiving all Europe, Englishmen included, with his daring and genius. Yet all without systematic calculation, without a care for the consequences of failure, with a most ridiculously inadequate amount of capital—(if there was ever any capital in these enterprises at all),—the whole being the outcome of a restless, ambitious, and reckless brain, impelled by the forces of passion, covetousness, and desire for power, the whole ending, as it did a year or two ago, in a disastrous break down—bankruptcy, imprisonment, disgrace, and final extinguishment.

From recklessness, I pass on to the next characteristic, closely connected with it, and only another step in the same line of career, yet with a deeper moral shade. I mean *unscrupulousness.* It is one of the most painful characteristics of modern business when

carried on on a large scale, that the men who engage in such enterprises are often hurried along, sometimes almost unconsciously, to do and say things which are unjust, untruthful, arbitrary, and more or less dishonorable. This may seem a severe sentence, but it is as true as it is severe. When men have had great objects to accomplish, a great scheme to inaugurate, a great enterprise to bring through many difficulties to a successful conclusion, there has too often been developed a spirit of overbearing injustice, of double dealing and treachery, of unfaithfulness to trusts, that has left stains upon the good name of many, who, in private life, and in the ordinary affairs of the world, have been truthful, honorable, benevolent, and even apparently religious men. In connection with the enormous development of public works which has taken place during the last thirty or forty years, especially with the construction of railways, and all that this construction has involved, the promotion of Companies, the passage of Bills through Parliament, the giving out of contracts,—all demanding the employment of great numbers of men, the handling of vast sums of money, the engagement of varied forms of talent, the exercise of extraordinary knowledge of men and things, and an almost superhuman courage and perseverance;—in connection, I say, with all this, there was developed also—(I speak plain facts)—an amount of unscrupulousness which makes the record of the construction of many such works, marvellous though they are, and mighty monuments of human genius, too often a thing to be looked upon with sorrow and shame. That maxim, so scandalously perverted in religious affairs, "*The end sanctifies the means*," apparently became the rule by which men guided their conduct. That devilish saying that "*all is fair in politics and war*," was applied to the political games by which enterprises were carried through Legislatures and Parliaments, and by which war was carried on against the tremendous forces of nature. In the last century, a great Prime Minister sustained himself in power for years by a cunningly devised system of bribery, skilfully applied, and peculiarly adapted to the idiosyncrasy of the various persons with whom he had to deal. Walpole's system died with him, but it has been revived in another sphere of operation in these days.

With the era of the construction of great railways, particularly in Anglo-Saxon communities, there grew up an amount of corruption and bribery which at length became an organized system, recognized, expected, and to which the majority of men consented, shrugging the shoulders occasionally—their conscience giving them a twinge now and then, as briber met the bribed: but still going on without effectual check till its "iniquity was rank and smelt to heaven." It has been known that a contractor for a railway has made friends (after the manner of the unjust steward) with the Engineer who had to certify to the goodness of his work, and has prevailed upon that Engineer to allow him to deliver, instead of good, sound rails, second-hand, worn-out, and discarded rails, whose only proper use was to be melted down. Such a thing has been known as for a Prime Minister to receive a loan without security, for his own private use, from the contractor of a road to be built by his Government, it being perfectly understood that payment of the loan was never to be demanded.* And now in modern business in its larger developments, there has grown up such a system of indirect advantages, commissions, small bribes, gratuities, casual advantages, adulterations, imitations, and what-not, that, as men sometimes think, it is impossible for business to be carried on unless by recognizing them. Yet unscrupulousness is at the bottom of them all. Modern business, too, has acquired many of the characteristics of warfare. This is particularly the case with dealings on the great Stock Exchanges of Europe. On the part of many who have occupied prominent places there, the rules, methods, and spirit of warfare have become conspicuous and chronic. The crushing of rivals, the laying of ambuscades, the daring raids into the enemy's camp, the unscrupulous publication of falsehoods, lying proclamations (like Napoleon's old tactics), and deceptive telegrams, have become so common that their essentially vicious and abominable character is entirely forgotten.†

* I do not here refer to anything that has taken place in recent years in this country.

† In the delivery of the lecture, I emphasized the word *Europe*. Bad habits, however, sometimes cross the Atlantic. It would perhaps not be libellous to say that such things have been heard of even in this little sphere of Montreal.

The old-fashioned mode of conducting business was one in which men were content to "live and let live," to be one of many, to have your own trade, and to let your neighbor have his also. But this spirit of aggression, which delights in nothing so much as in trampling down and crushing those who are in the way, is only too common a characteristic of those who have climbed to the highest places in the modern business world, and from their immense elevation tyrannise like despots over the struggling crowd beneath. And their spirit is contagious.

Well, what is the result of all this? What has it led to? What is the outcome of it all? These characteristics, thus broadly given (perhaps I have dwelt too strongly upon their darker phases, but none can deny that they are characteristics), differing as they do from those which prevailed in former days, must have different fruit. And that they have very different fruit is patent enough to any careful observer. The old style led to a moderate and almost uniform success, to the making a quiet and honest living on the part of the many, the acquirement of a competency on the part of a few, and of a respectable fortune for those times (such as would be despised now) on the part of one here and there. But in these days, it is only too true that the greater part of those who engage in business do not succeed in it. They *fail*, as the saying is. But the word is one of those which are so ambiguous as to be so absolutely delusive. To fail in business one would suppose meant either not to make a competency, or not to be able to maintain in respectability those dependent upon us. But our use of this word implies much more and much worse,—viz., a failure to perform promises; a breaking of engagements, and a leaving unpaid of honest debts,—all of which imply that for some time past, longer or shorter, the person engaged in business has been living upon his creditors, and, with a few honorable exceptions, taking their money and appropriating their property, without their knowledge and against their consent—helping himself and his family, who have lived often enough recklessly and luxuriously all the time, to the means which they had acquired by honest

labor. Failure means that I have had a thousand dollars worth of my neighbor's goods, and I pay him for only $200 worth of them, spending or keeping the rest myself. Failure now-a-days means that I have induced a monied friend or institution to lend me $10,000, ostensibly for the purpose of carrying on an honorable and respectable business, but really to engage in stock or business gambling, or to build and furnish extravagantly a house or mill, and thus outrival my successful neighbor;—the end of it being that I go to my monied friend and say (in effect), "Consent, if you please, to this arrangement: I will pay you $2,000 out of this $10,000, if you will allow me to *keep* what represents the other $8,000." And if my monied friend remonstrates, as he very naturally will, I the person failing! tell him very coolly that I have spent the other $8,000, or put it where he cannot get it, let him try as he will, and that if he will not take the $2,000, he may do the best he can—perhaps get nothing. This is the meaning of *failure* in these enlightened times, and to this melancholy and disreputable end very much of our business is brought. But so it is. Our methods, indeed, have become so refined, that persons are able to pass through this process again and again during their lifetime. Two or three times in the course of a very few years, men have been known to practice this piece of business-legerdemain, their families all the while living in luxury, and they themselves sometimes driving along with carriage and pair on the day of the meeting of their creditors, while those very creditors, whose money they are spending, quietly pass them on foot.*

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* A creditor in these times may enjoy the singular pleasure of conferring with his debtor in a magnificent library, the property—save the mark!—of the debtor's wife, as to the expediency of taking five cents in the dollar by composition, or winding up his estate by an assignee and getting one and a half! That creditor may even have the further gratification of being reviled by the debtor and his family for having the audacity to enquire into the manner in which the splendidly furnished house—with library aforesaid—became the property of the lady rather than the gentleman—her husband. Nay, to such a pass has public sentiment come, that the Board of Trade of the Dominion lately demeaned themselves to elect an undischarged bankrupt as President, and actually discussed the provisions of the Insolvency Law while

This is one development, and a very disgusting development, of modern methods of business.

Along with this, there is another which is just as striking, viz., the accumulation, in the hands of a few, of enormous and colossal fortunes, such as were never dreamed of in former days. Our modern system, which, as I have observed, gives a man all the world for his customers, enables men of gigantic capacity and iron-willed energy, coupled, not always,—but too often,—with determined unscrupulousness, to do such masses of business and accumulate such enormous profits, that they stride the commercial world like a colossus, leaving lesser men to crawl beneath with fear and trembling. Men like the late A. T. Stewart, who complained, a few years ago, when he returned his income to the tax assessors of New York at the much diminished sum of $1,800,000,! and left behind a fortune to be measured only by tens of millions, scattered over two or three continents. Or like that other great magnate, whose family are, and have for some time past been scandalising the world with their disgusting squabbles over his private affairs. He left his family millions upon millions to fight about, and fighting about it they are, like hungry dogs about a bone. This squabble arose through some of them being left with the miserable pittance of $1,000,000 a piece! A *million* forsooth! *Only* a million! Is not this an extraordinary example of the deceitfulness of riches, that these people, left with a million dollars, look down upon it with disgust, as if a million were equivalent to beggary! But thus it is. The men who helped themselves by millions at a time from the treasury of the City of Glasgow Bank, consisting of moneys

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he was Chairman! Some unkind critics might say that nobody could discuss a law like this with so much intelligence as a trader who was having personal experience of it. These things have become a public scandal amongst us, and it is high time a healthier public sentiment was generated. In the very nature of things, for a man not to pay his debts is a thing to be ashamed of—a thing to be so utterly avoided that a debtor would scorn to retain a fine house and furniture after he became unable to discharge his obligations. An honest sentiment would be that a man would almost sell the very coat from his back rather than leave his debts unpaid.

carefully scraped together, pound by pound, year by year, of the hard-worked professional man, of the economical maiden lady, of the widow living quietly on the little competency left by her industrious tradesman husband; the money deposited for safety by the tacksman of the remote Highlands, the farmer saving up his gains until his rent became due, and all the multitude of the thrifty class, who have made Scotland what it is to-day,—these men, I say, taking the money of the people who were a thousand times better than themselves, no doubt intended to pile up one of those colossal fortunes, and to die leaving their millions behind them. But they unfortunately have left their millions, not as a fortune, but as a disgraceful mass of debt, to liquidate which will ruin thousands.

Much of this may sound strange to you; and it is certainly in flat contradiction to things that are very often said; said not by wise men, for they know better, but by the thoughtless and the ignorant, knowing but little of life. There cannot be a greater delusion than to imagine that the real value and preciousness of this life of ours is bound up in material wealth. Wealth of mind, spiritual riches, the wealth which a man has who has choice and staunch friends; the wealth of books, the wealth of house and wife, and children, and family,—these are realities. They are true. They are solid. They are lasting. One of the wisest and most discriminating critics of modern times has observed that in the order of God's Providence, the only really precious things, the valuable treasures of life, home, friends, wife, children, health, are within the reach of all, both rich and poor alike. But this debasing sentiment, scorned even by wise heathen, and much more to be scorned by instructed christians,—this degrading passion for accumulation, is a thing to be abhorred by God and man. Nothing can be more true as a matter of experience, that "they who *will* be rich fall into a *snare*, and into grievous and hurtful lusts, that drown men in destruction and perdition."

In saying this, it may be objected that I am standing in the way of modern progress, and want to turn the wheels of time back.

Nothing of the kind. Progress is the law of God's universe. Progress is undoubtedly God's destiny for mankind. God himself has given us the command to take the whole earth, and bring its forces under subjection. That task is not half accomplished yet. Still less is that higher command accomplished, of bringing the spiritual world under His sway. But there is a progress which lasts, and there is one which does not last. There is a progress which is intermittent and unhealthy; an eager race for a time, all hot, breathless, and uneasy, ending in a break-down and collapse. There is, on the other hand, a quiet, steady, persistent progress, from which a man never turns back; in which he makes, step by step, an advance, from which he never recedes, his progress resembling the development of God's dispensations, or the march of the great universe itself, in which there is no going back, and no standing still. This is a progress which yields permanent satisfaction, and this progress, the principles I have laid down will certainly secure.

I have dwelt, you see, very largely upon the unfavorable aspects of modern business. I wish, indeed, to lift my voice rather as a note of warning. The times that we are passing through are fruitful in stern and severe lessons. We were drunk with the spirit of inflated ambition and rapid fortune-making a few years ago. So were England and Scotland, and so were the United States. All the things I have been describing had their full swing and mighty course in those days, when we all thought we were so rich and prosperous. But the revels of the night have been succeeded by the calm reflection of a very sober morning. We are in that morning of reflection and sobriety now. Let us make a wise use of it. We can take a calm view of what a few years ago it would have been impossible to judge rightly. We see things now as we never saw them before, and we are coming to find out how true many of those old Scripture sayings are, which in times of ambition and recklessness we were apt to despise as mere material for sermon-making. The true philosophy of all money-getting was condensed into a single sentence, thousands of years ago, by the wisest man of his age and time, whose Book of Proverbs still lives for our guidance in

secular as well as spiritual things. You may read there that "wealth gathered by labor shall increase, but that which is gotten by vanity shall be diminished." Vanity here stands in opposition to labor. Labor on the one hand, with its slow and steady, but sure processes, ending in wealth, increasing, and permanently maintained. Vanity on the other, represented, I should say, by what we call speculative operations, a reckless style of business, the getting of things by happy-go-luck, stock gambling—everything, in fact, that is not the outcome of labor. Such wealth, although it may be gathered, and is gathered, through speculation and trade gambling, and may give a man a fortune, yet the saying of the wise man, the result of his experience, is, that wealth gathered in this way decreases. It takes to itself wings and flies away, leaving behind it a demoralized life. For such men, when wealth is once gone, are rarely good for anything in the world again. Our Lord, in His sermon on the Mount, laid down a rule, which, if observed in business transactions, would prevent nine-tenths of the evils that I have been attempting to describe. *Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.* Put yourself in the place of other men. Consider *them.* Deal fairly by them. Live and let live. Avoid monopoly. Don't trample men down that come in your way, as you would not yourself be trampled down by others who may come after you. Business carried on on such principles satisfies both buyer and seller, and is profitable for both. There is another sentence later on in the same Book of life and light, which relates to some idle busybodies who were the plague of early churches. Against these an Apostle warned his friends—(and they lived in a busy commercial city)—that they should study to be *quiet*, and to *mind their own business*, and to *work with their own hands.* How admirable these words sound in these times of restlessness and disquietude. To mind our own business: to *have* a business, to be master of it—a business that we can call *our own*, not something that we have robbed our neighbor of, but got for ourselves honestly and fairly,—to *mind* this business, giving the mind and the thought and the calculation to it, and putting our hands to the work—and in the end, not only paying our debts and providing

things honorably in the sight of all men, but having a superfluity to give to him that needeth. Against the idle, thriftless and "loafing" habits which are so common to the younger men in wealthy communities, by which some of the most promising young men in this country have already been destroyed; habits which result largely from the want of business and occupation, against these how impressively are we warned in that Book of Proverbs which I have quoted before: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise; For she having neither guide, overseer nor ruler, prepareth her food in the Summer, and gathereth that which she needeth until the Harvest."

If young men now beginning life would escape the pitfalls which modern business life offers; if they would be honorable and successful, and continue a career which they can look back upon at the close of life without remorse or regret; giving pleasure to talk about to their children, let them drink deep into these fundamental principles of conduct, and of life. Let *these* be the guide; and I venture to say, that they will conduct any business that may be entrusted to them by others with satisfaction to their employers and with credit to themselves. They will *mind* his business. They will not be slothful, nor wasteful of his time. They will do to him as they would he should do to them; that is, in a word, they will be faithful. And when called upon to assume higher responsibilities and to embark in the great sea of business for themselves, I will venture to say that they will not *fail.* For it is in the power of men so to conduct their business, that failure is almost impossible. If young men engage in a business for which they have been trained; if they are industrious, if they avoid vanity, foolish spending, speculation, and extravagance in living; if they make it their business to deal honorably by customers and creditors; if they *mind* a business when it has become their own, be quiet about it and persistent; if they provide, that is, look ahead; consider carefully, avoid entangling engagements; if they make it a rule to "owe no man anything"—(that is, pay everything on the day it is due, the plain meaning of the passage),—I venture to predict success as the outcome of their career. You will not, at any rate, disgrace your family, your

friends, or your children. You may not build up a colossal fortune, but you will have what is a great deal better—a good name. Having a rule of guidance you will learn to use wealth as a wise steward. You will distribute liberally and give considerately. And you will have the wisdom, while in life, to dispense much of that with which God has enriched you. And if you do not leave a fortune for your children to quarrel about, to be a perpetual source of heartburning, strife and misery amongst those who bear your name in coming days, you will leave them what is in every respect of infinitely more value—the heritage of a name, which your children will be proud of, and thankful for. And you will leave to the community an example of what a man may be, who eschews the evil influences of the times and the passing days in which his lot is cast, and guides every action of his life by those principles of light, justice and truth, which are embalmed in God's Eternal Word.